

Historic Designation in St. Paul:

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Heritage Preservation Commission?

The St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) was created in 1976. The thirteen citizen board is charged with protecting the city's historic resources. The duties of the HPC include evaluating the architectural and historical significance of buildings and districts, recommending buildings and districts to the city council for designation, and reviewing proposed alterations to designated properties.

How many historic properties are there in St. Paul?

More than 60 individual properties and 6 historic districts have been locally designated in St. Paul. Designated properties include a variety of types and styles including houses, churches, warehouses, offices, commercial properties, and parks. Just two of the city's historic districts B the Historic Hill District and the Dayton's Bluff District together include hundreds of individual properties. A total of approximately 2,500 sites are already designated within St. Paul.

What are the criteria for historic designation?

The HPC considers the following criteria in determining whether an individual building or district is worthy of historic designation:

- (1) The properties' character, interest or value is part of the heritage or cultural characteristics of the city of St. Paul, State of Minnesota, or the United States.
- (2) The properties' location is the site of a significant historic event.
- (3) The properties are identifiable with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City of St. Paul.
- (4) The properties exhibit a distinguished characteristic of an architectural or engineering specimen.
- (5) The properties are identifiable as the work of an architect, engineer, or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of St. Paul.
- (6) The properties embody elements of architectural or engineering design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represents a significant architectural or engineering innovation.
- (7) The properties' unique location or physical characteristic is established and familiar in the neighborhoods or communities of the City of St. Paul.

My building is part of a local historic district. What does this mean?

Local historic district designation is a form of protection for historic properties. Through designation, the city has determined that properties within the district have special historical significance and that your building is an important part of the city's heritage worthy of protection from inappropriate changes or destruction.

If my building is located in a historic district do I need the Commission's approval to make changes?

Every building within an historic district is protected under the city's heritage preservation ordinance. If you want to make exterior alterations to your building (with the exception of minor alterations mentioned below), you must obtain HPC approval before beginning the work. Once the proposal is reviewed by the HPC and found to be consistent with the character of the district you will be issued approval to proceed with the work.

Are there any types of work that does not require HPC approval?

Yes. Generally, all interior changes and ordinary exterior repairs such as removing small amounts of painted graffiti, do not require HPC approval. In addition, the HPC staff may approve minor exterior alterations that are executed with the same type of materials or methods. The HPC staff can tell you whether HPC approval is needed for the type of work you are considering.

Will historic district designation prevent alterations and new construction?

No. Historic designation does not "freeze" a building or an area. The goal of designation is not to prevent change, but guide it. Alterations, demolition, and new construction continue to take place, but the HPC must first review the proposed changes for compatibility with the historic character of the district.

Why does the HPC review new construction on vacant lots?

The HPC reviews proposals for new construction to ensure that the new building or structure is consistent with the scale and character of the historic district and will not detract from the special qualities of surrounding buildings.

Can the HPC make me restore my building to the way it looked when built?

No. The HPC reviews proposed alterations. It cannot require you to restore your building to its original appearance. For example, if at the time of designation your building had a modern entrance, the HPC cannot make you restore the original entrance. However, if you propose additional major changes to the entrance, the HPC would review these for consistency with the historic character of the building.

I want to sell my building within an historic district. Must I tell the Heritage Preservation Commission?

No. You do not need to tell the HPC that you are selling your building. Historic district designation places no restrictions on an owner's right to use or to sell his or her property.

What is the difference between a National Register Historic District and a local historic district?

The National Register of Historic Places is a list of buildings, sites, and districts of local, state, or national importance. This program is administered by the National Park Service through the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office. Some of the city's historic districts also are National register districts, although exact boundaries may differ. Inclusion in what is solely a National Register District does not require HPC review of proposed alterations. For more information on the National Register, contact the State Historic Preservation Office at (651) 296 - 5434.

Are there federal or state tax benefits associated with local designation?

Locally designated properties generally are not eligible for historic preservation rehabilitation tax credits unless the property also is listed in the National Register of Historic Places or has been certified by the National Park Service as essentially meeting National Register criteria.

What benefits are associated with local designation?

By preserving an area's unique appearance and heritage, local historic designation can provide stability to an area and form a basis for economic development and attraction of new business and residential investment. In addition, local designation allows the city to review and approve requests for alternatives to full compliance with the building code.

Where can I get more information?

The HPC office is located in the Department of Safety and Inspections office, 8 E. Fourth Street, Suite 200. The HPC staff is happy to answer questions you may have about historic preservation. Lists of locally designated buildings are available upon request. HPC meetings and public hearings are held monthly in St. Paul City Hall, Room 40. The public is welcome to attend. The dates and times of meetings are available by calling the HPC staff at (651) 266 - 9078.

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